

THE NINTH SUNDAY OF THE YEAR – C

Jesus finishes his discourse and returns to Capernaum and we have the healing of the centurion's servant with the centurion saying the words, 'I am not worthy to have you under my roof...' words we pray at Mass before we go to communion. In the first reading we have King Solomon in prayer asking that God hear the prayer the prayer of the foreigner when he comes to pray in the Temple. The second reading is the opening of Paul's letter to the Galatians and his astonishment at their turning away from the Good News he preached to them.

The **First Reading** is from the first book of Kings, one of the historical books of the Bible. Books 1 and 2 Kings are a continuation from books 1 and 2 Samuel, indeed the first two chapters of 1 Kings which deal with the death of king David, are the concluding chapters of 2 Samuel 9-20. The two books of Kings deal with the reign of Solomon, 1 Kings 3-11, his wisdom, his riches, his building programme including the Temple. It was an age of peace but also of exploitation which aggravated the existing hostility between Judah, in the south, and the northern tribes, Israel. On Solomon's death his kingdom split in two and to the political secession of the northern tribes was added religious schism. This was a period of fraternal strife and attacks from outside; Egypt attacked Judah and the Aramaeans (Syria) attacked the northern tribes. This was only a prelude to the fall of Samaria, capital of the North, to the Assyrians in 721 and the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonian king in 587, followed by Exile. Woven in among these accounts are the Elijah and Elisha cycles, the two great prophets of the period who had much to say about the religious conduct of the kings of the North. After the political division the kings of Israel are all judged guilty of abandoning Temple sacrifice and erecting a shrine of their own at Bethel, and only two kings of Judah receive fulsome praise. All this ran contrary to the teaching of Deuteronomy that the Temple alone was the place for sacrifice and that the nation will be blessed only if it respects God's covenant and it will be punished if it does not.

The reading, 8.41-43, follows the building of the Temple and the ark being brought into the Temple and it is part of a supplementary section added after the return from exile in 538. The Temple is a place where anyone can offer prayer to God and Solomon prays that the foreigner's prayer be heard. The idea that the God the Israelites worshipped is the God of all peoples gradually develops through the history of the Chosen People.

The **Responsorial Psalm**, Psalm 116.1-2, is a summons to all nations to praise God 'for his faithful love is strong and his constancy never ending.'

The **Second Reading** is from Paul's letter to the Galatians. Galatia was part of central Turkey and Paul preached in the southern tip of Galatia on his first missionary journey and he passed through northern Galatia on his second and third missionary journeys. It is uncertain where the letter was written, Ephesus or Macedonia, and when, possibly about the year 57. In the letter, after his introduction, Paul gives an account of his conversion and his meeting in Jerusalem with the elders of the Church which brings out the main point of this letter. After preaching the Risen Christ to the Galatians and bringing them into the Church some Judaisers, that is, those who held that the Old Law and its practises should not be abandoned, unsettled the Galatians in their new found faith. Paul says to the Galatians that they are stupid people and someone has put a spell on them. Abraham put his faith in God which made him righteous in the sight of God, yet he lived many years before the Law given to Moses. It is not keeping the Law which brings righteousness but faith and for the Galatians it is their faith in Jesus Christ. The Israelites were slaves under the Law but Christ by his death has released them from slavery and enabled them to become adopted sons of God. Paul concludes his letter with an exhortation on Christian liberty and love, kindness and perseverance.

The reading, 1.1-2,6-10, begins with Paul setting out his credentials, he was 'appointed by Jesus Christ and by God the Father who raised him from the dead.' Paul then sets out his purpose in writing, he is astonished that the Galatians have turned to believe a different version of the Good News from the one Paul preached. He warns the Galatians that if he, Paul, or an angel from God even were to preach 'a version of the Good News different from the one we have already preached to you....he is to be condemned.' Paul maintains he is not looking for men's approval if he were 'I should not be what I am – a servant of Christ.' Paul makes his position abundantly clear to the Galatians.